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A
L E T T E R
T O
THOMAS GILBERT, Esq; *W*
ON HIS
INTENDED REFORM
OF THE
P O O R L A W S.

By A COUNTRY GENTLEMAN.



L O N D O N :

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M.DCC.LXXXVII.



A

L E T T E R, &c.

Lancaster, March 25, 1787.

S I R,

I AM very glad to see that you are determined to proceed in bringing forward your promised scheme for better regulating the great concern of the poor. I had read your *Heads of a Bill, &c.* with great attention, and great pleasure. I am a little conversant with the Poor Laws, both in the letter and the execution, and could discern how your new plan was meant to apply; but I believe that this was not so distinguishable to persons un-

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acquainted with both ; and the starch parliamentary form of that pamphlet was not likely to engage negligent uninformed readers, even though desirous of information. If your plan has been misapprehended, and misrepresented, it must be ascribed to this. I was, therefore, rejoiced when I saw your new pamphlet intitled, *Considerations on the intended Bill, &c.* You seem there to have supplied every thing that was wanting in your former ; you have there laid open the present defects of our system for the poor, and have established your intended reform upon grounds of argument and experience, so clearly, and so forcibly, that no one can any longer doubt, but your's is the plan which can alone be adopted with safety, and with tolerable security of success.

THOUGH we all feel the heavy burthen of the poor, I am astonished to learn from you, that the rates have increased half a
million

million within these nine years. While we see a growing burthen like this, and the evils which ought to be wholly removed by it, increasing in the same proportion, it is time the legislature was impressed with a thorough sense of the grievance; after which they cannot hesitate in correcting it by some legislative regulation. The public are infinitely indebted to you for your benevolence, activity, and perseverance, in endeavouring to attain an object so ardently to be wished; and I trust, we shall have the satisfaction, this session, of seeing your patriotic design carried into effect,

WHAT recommends your plan to me, and what ought to recommend it to every lover of our laws and constitution, is, that it is no project, built on the conceit of the inventor, novel and untried; the consequences of which are not easily seen, or conjectured; but a reform of the law, dictated by the law itself, and warranted by

actual experience. It is true, you have introduced these under new appellations. County Committees, District Committees, and District Agent, are novelties in name; but they are the same as are called in various places, *Guardians of the Poor*, *Directors of the Poor*, and the like; and I confess myself, I should have preferred these latter terms to those you have chosen. I would have called the County Committee, the *County Guardians of the Poor*; the District Committee, the *District Guardians of the Poor*. I would then call the District Agent, the *District Overseer*: this term would truly express the office of the man who is to *oversee* the Poor in the whole District; and this would exactly agree not only with our modern notion of Overseers of the Poor, but with the original one, to which you allude in your *Considerations*, &c. when it was applied to an officer who had a sort of superintendence over the Collectors. As to the officers you call *Overseers* in your plan, of which

which there is to be one in each parish, or perhaps one to two or three parishes, I would call them *Parish Overseers*, to distinguish them from the District Overseer; or, perhaps, *Agents* to the District Overseer; or, to come nearer to the ancient idea before alluded to, they might be termed merely *Collectors*.

WHATEVER names are given to the persons who fill the several departments to which you have assigned them, the office they are to discharge, and the co-operation and dependence that is to subsist between them, promise the best effects in the management of the poor, because we have seen institutions of a similar nature produce like effects in various parts of the kingdom. The proportion in which the poor-rates in the incorporated Hundreds in Norfolk and Suffolk, and in the united parishes of the town of Shrewsbury, appear from your pamphlet to be lowered, when

when compared with those of the neighbouring parishes, is what ought to satisfy every one, that your scheme is founded upon just principles.

NOTWITHSTANDING the just grounds upon which your scheme is founded, there are to this, as to every other proposition of a public nature, persons who raise objections, from various motives, and to answer different purposes.

AN occasion to objection has been, undesignedly, furnished by gentlemen who labor in the same public work with yourself. Among the most respectable of those who have made public any scheme of reform, is Mr. ACLAND, whose pamphlet does him great honor, as a man and a citizen. But with all the merit his proposal is intitled to, it surely is greatly misunderstood by those who place it in competition with your's, as if the two plans were directed

ted at the same object, and the adoption of the one would render the other perfectly unnecessary.

MR. ACLAND proposes to extend the principle and design of those FRIENDLY SOCIETIES and CLUBS, that are well known in trading towns, and in most parts of the kingdom. Instead of voluntary institutions, that may be destroyed, at any time, by the caprice or indiscretion of the members ; it is proposed by him that a parliamentary sanction should be obtained, making such establishments general throughout the kingdom, and giving a degree of stability to them, by adding certain restrictions, and compulsions, that would at once secure the regularity of contributions, and the due application of the funds to the purposes of their institution. The detail of this scheme is entered into very minutely, and credit may be given to the calculations of Mr. Acland and his correspondent Dr. Price,

Price, for the consequences that would follow from the *data* on which they rest. A multitude, no doubt, would be intitled to, and would receive temporary relief from such fund; and the poor-rates might, possibly, be eased of much of the burthen that they are now obliged to bear alone.

I WILL make no question on the practicability of this scheme; nor will I express any doubt, wheher the lower class of people would like to part with their two-pences, when they were called upon by parliament so to do; for I mean not to raise objections to this very ingenious proposal. But I would beg to ask, What does all this promise towards removing the grievance complained of? The Overseers are still to make the rates; *they* are still to direct the application of the money; *they* are to have the management of the poor; they are to be changed *annually*; the same inability

ability and inexperience, the same waste and mismanagement is to continue; the same formal and ridiculous method of passing parish accounts before a Justice is still to be the only security for a due performance of parish trusts, where two millions of money, and hundreds of thousands of poor persons, are the objects of those trusts. All these grievances will continue; and will, as before, go on to increase, *till* Mr. Acland's scheme shall produce, if it ever does, the effect so confidently predicted by its promotion.

It seems, therefore, not the safest nor the shortest way of correcting the abuses in the present system of poor laws, to erect another scheme, which proposes nothing else but to prevent the occasion of demanding relief of the parish; and if such new scheme, besides the objection of novelty, should be at all questionable in its supposed consequences and effects, it

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would be, to the last degree, unwise and impolitic to adopt it. Money would then be drawn out of the pockets of individuals by two demands, instead of one; the *parish plan* and the *contributory plan*, with all their distinct machinery, would be going on together, and call for double attention; all the miscarriages attendant upon each scheme would be multiplied; waste, mismanagement, and abuses would be operating with twofold mischief every hour.

BUT I am rather disposed not to augur ill of Mr. Acland's plan; and it is upon the supposition of its being practicable, and likely to answer its design, that I still contend it is not to be placed in competition with your's, which goes at once to the evil complained of, and proposes to eradicate it root and branch. *When* you have transferred the regulation and management of the poor from those unfaithful stewards the present Overseers, into the
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the hands of gentlemen of fortune and character in your District Committee, and into those of the District Agent, and Overseers appointed by the District Committee; men of ability who are paid for their services, and will be paid no longer than they perform them; *when* you have declared by law that the poor-rate shall never exceed its present level; and *when* a plan of œconomy and good government is established in the concern of the poor, which, to a demonstration, will immediately reduce it; *when* all these objects, which stand foremost in every man's mind who thinks on this subject, are first secured by a plan so obvious and practicable as *experience* has shewn your's to be; *then* we may be at leisure to make an experiment of Mr. Acland's scheme: it will be equally useful and effective then, as it can be now; and whether it fails or succeeds, there will always be the satisfaction to reflect, that the reformation was begun in the right place. Mr. Acland's plan

may come in aid of your's, but never can be a substitute for it. The promotion of *Friendly Societies* appears by your *Heads of a Bill, &c.* to have been in your contemplation; you seem to place great hope in these, and in charitable donations, as auxiliary to the poor-rate. Mr. Acland's improvement on the former cannot fail of being greatly approved by you.

I SHOULD think these considerations will weigh with gentlemen, who hear the scheme of *Friendly Societies* opposed to your's, as a more probable plan *for the better relief and employment of the Poor.*

BUT there are opponents who are not to be convinced by arguments or by facts. It has become a fashion for Justices of the Peace to hold meetings, and come to Resolutions upon matters depending in parliament: these Resolutions generally contain something complimentary on the dignity

nity and character of a Justice, and are sent forth into the world in print, with the name of some Justice subscribed. There is a persuasion that what is promulgated from such authority deserves attention; and indeed no attention could otherwise be paid to this sort of publications. They are distinguished from all others by a certain assumed importance, and a peculiar sterility of matter, that is not uncharacteristic of the bench of magistrates. I remember it was once boldly said by a famous lawyer, that he would regard the Resolutions of the House of Commons no more than the Resolutions of so many drunken porters. I do not pretend to say how just this animadversion might be; but I should be curious to know, what the same learned *Speaker* would have said, if he had been called upon to pass an encomium on the Resolutions that sometimes are formed and published with so much formality by Justices of the Peace.

I FIND

I FIND, sir, the Magistrates at Wakefield in Yorkshire* have been playing off this game upon your intended reform. Certain printed regulations, dated Feb. 2, 1787, signed *H. Zouch*, Chairman, are levelled wholly at your bill. Among these there appears one Resolution respec-

WAKEFIELD, February 2, 1787.

* AT a respectable meeting of Justices of the Peace, Clergy, Gentlemen, and others, held here this day, for the purpose of taking into consideration Mr. GILBERT's intended Bill respecting the Poor Laws,

It is unanimously Resolved,

THAT this plan of Mr. GILBERT is projected upon so large and complicated a scale, as to defeat its own purpose.

THAT the necessary load of business which is to be imposed upon so many individuals, and who are *compellable*, under certain penalties, to undertake it, cannot possibly be endured.

THAT it will prove highly oppressive upon the poor, who are the objects of it.

THAT Justices of the Peace, in matters relative to the poor, will be hereby rendered the mere Ministers of Office, to levy penalties and forfeitures, or to preside at a ballot.

THAT so far from *preventing* disputes between parishes, it may be *productive* of endless litigation.

THAT

ting the good old cause of the magistracy, the support of which is the principle that alone inspires them with any diligence or activity. *Resolved, that the*

THAT the immediate and consequential expences thereof will amount to an enormous sum, a sum beyond any idea of reasonable computation.

THAT the whole system of the Poor Laws will be shaken to its very foundation, because not less than thirty Acts of Parliament must be revised or repealed, and most of them founded on the *good old law of Queen Elizabeth*, of which that eminent Judge Sir *William Blackstone* speaks in the following strong and decided terms :

“ A plan was formed in the reign of *Queen Elizabeth*, more humane and beneficial than even feeding
 “ and cloathing of millions, by affording the poor means
 “ (with proper industry) to feed and cloath themselves.
 “ And the further any subsequent plans for maintaining
 “ the poor have departed from this institution, the more
 “ *impracticable*, and even *pernicious*, their *visionary at-*
 “ *tempts* have proved.”

Resolved therefore, THAT the Resolutions come to by this meeting, be sent to the Members for this County; and that they be desired to use their best endeavours to prevent the passing of Mr. GILBERT's Bill into a law; and that such Resolutions be also transmitted to the Members for the City of York, and the Boroughs within the County, and to such other Members of the House of Commons as the Chairman may think proper.

THAT

Justices of the Peace, in matters relative to the poor, will be hereby rendered the mere **MINISTERS of Office, to levy penalties and forfeitures, or to preside at a BALLOT.** It is astonishing that Mr. Zouch and his associates should believe this supposed consequence of your scheme would not be laughed at by all serious persons, not tainted with the infatuation of a set of Country Justices; for if this consequence should really follow, there would not be much charge in the law, nor much degradation in the magistracy. Mr. Zouch is very unfit for his office, if he does not know, that, in the present state of things,

THAT the Chairman be empowered to call a General Meeting of the Gentlemen, Clergy, Freeholders, and Inhabitants of the West-Riding of Yorkshire, whenever in his opinion it shall be necessary to take Mr. GILBERT'S Bill into further consideration.

THAT the thanks of the meeting be given to the Chairman,

H. Z O U C H, Chairman.

a Justice

a Justice acts only *ministerially* in the two most important concerns of the poor, the signing the rate, and the allowing the overseers account. As to the presiding at a ballot, many a better man than any *acting* magistrate at Wakefield, continually performs that office; and it is well known that a Justice is very often less usefully employed.

IN short, sir, I am nauseated with the repetitions we have on all these occasions, of the *dignity* and *importance* of Justices of the Peace. These are held forth as the *end* and *consummation* of our police and our laws; as if the constitution was made for Justices, and not Justices for the constitution. When it was in agitation to make a reform in the police of the metropolis, it was predicted that the Justices would be against it; and this prediction was accurately accomplished: the Justices came to resolutions respecting their own *importance*

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and *dignity*; and they imagined these were infinitely more sacred than the public peace, and the safety and quiet of the subject.

WHEN we hear so much about the importance and dignity of *office*, it is natural to conclude, that there is very little of either in the *person* who fills it; and that there may be some suspicion that even the office does not usually enjoy its due share of both. This is nearly the present state of this once respectable magistracy; the office is fallen into disrepute: if it is anywhere respected, the respect is shewn to the person who happens to fill it. There is even a shyness about undertaking it, among gentlemen of character and respectability; and it is very rare, indeed, that a person talks proudly of this office, if he has any thing else to be proud of.

BUT the importance and dignity of the office is not the only, nor the true cause that
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makes Justices of Peace so alert on these occasions. If the King's Commission conferred nothing but honour, it would be regarded only as a piece of parchment with a seal dangling to it. In the affairs of the Poor, the Justices are somewhat more than *mere ministers of office*; they derive a considerable fund from thence: summonses, warrants, orders, the passing of vagrants, the removal of paupers, &c. furnish a handsome revenue to a Justice in a populous manufacturing town, and make him feel very easy under the burthen of poor-rates, which his neighbours share with him, without any share of this consolation. It is, therefore, the *profit* and not the *honour* of the magistracy that is meant in these solemn appeals; and we find, accordingly, that those who receive no part of the former, are, in general, very indifferent about the latter.

It is not, therefore, at all to be wondered at, that you have already met with

opposition from the Justices of the Peace. If you preach down Diana of the Ephesians, you must expect Demetrius and the Craftsmen, who make silver shrines for her, will raise a clamour, and cabal in favour of the goddess, by whom they live. You ought still to persevere, trusting in the goodness of your cause, and the support truth will always find with those who have no interest to suppress or withstand it.

I MEAN no reflection on Mr. Zouch, whom I only know by his printed name at the foot of these Resolutions; much less on Mr. Bailey of Manchester, who says, he is an acting Justice in that populous town, and who has signed his name to several letters against your plan in the *Morning Chronicle*. It is individuals, and not the body, that I blame; and I am very ready to admit those gentlemen are of a very different description from the Justices

I mean,

I mean. It happens, that they have both put themselves in situations, which make it necessary for me to recur to their names on the present occasion.

I CANNOT, however, help observing, that Mr. Zouch and his associates seem perverted both in their understanding and will. To support the good old cause of magistracy, they are anxious to establish the credit of *the good old law* (as they term it) of *Queen Elizabeth*; meaning the Stat. 43. Eliz. In this attempt they are pleased to vouch the authority of Mr. Justice Blackstone, and they adduce a passage containing a very high encomium on *the plan formed in the reign of Queen Elizabeth*. But they are mistaken in supposing the learned Judge meant here to extol their favorite Statute 43. Eliz. This commendation is so general, as to apply equally to the other statutes of *Queen Elizabeth* which preceded this of the 43d, and had the same beneficial object

ject in view which the learned Judge means to applaud, tho' they pursued it by somewhat different means; one of which is alluded to in your pamphlet, and adopted in your plan. However, without putting this construction on the passage, and allowing it all its weight as a panegyric on Stat. 43. Eliz. these gentlemen judged very ill in placing this extract in so conspicuous a part of their Resolutions, as to look like the unanswerable authority upon which they meant to rest their whole proceeding.

IN truth, this splendid patch, tho' an ornament to the Wakefield Resolutions, is far from such to the learned author from whom it is taken. It is a flourishing passage, in the cursory historical view of the law, in the last chapter of the Commentaries, where it was the writer's business to be short, encomiastic, and general; and it is not precisely the place where any one
who

who wanted this learned Judge's opinion as a lawyer, would look for it. A sincere enquirer after truth would turn to that chapter in the first book of the Commentaries, where the present system of poor laws is amply discussed through all its branches. There he would find the following passages, which would not answer the purpose of the Yorkshire Justices, but are most expressly, sir, in favor of your plan. The author there declares it

“ a defect in the Statute of Elizabeth,
 “ that the management of the poor was
 “ confined to small parochial Districts,
 “ which are frequently incapable of furnishing proper work, or providing an
 “ able director.”—He complains of the
 “ subdivision of parishes.”—He reprobates
 “ the whole law of settlements, and the
 “ removals of paupers.”—He says, “ that,
 “ notwithstanding the pains that have been
 “ taken about the poor laws, they still
 “ remain very imperfect, and inadequate
 “ to

“ to the purposes they were designed for.”

—He says, that “ the scheme of the Stat.

“ 43. Eliz. has been departed from.”—

He complains, “ that stock is not pro-

“ vided for the poor to work up at home,

“ but that they are crouded in a common

“ workhouse, which was not the design

“ of the Stat. 43. Eliz.” (See Bla. Com.

book 1. ch. 9. at the latter end.)

So that if Blackstone is to be the authority, Mr. Zouch and his associates are doubly wrong; for he does not give intire applause to Stat. 43. Eliz. but thinks it faulty in one respect; and he complains, that the part which deserves praise is now abrogated, or wholly abandoned; and I wish no better authority to shew that Mr. Zouch and his associates are defending a cause that is indefensible.

It is predicted in these Resolutions, that
the great weight of business which you
throw

throw on your Committees, *cannot be endured*. I am sorry to hear such a feeling declaration from *acting* magistrates, who know what business is. The County Committees are to sit once a quarter; the District Committee once a month. But there is a circumstance which may make even this attendance burthen some in the eyes of some; that is,—they are not to receive any compensation or emolument. To these objections I answer thus: That persons who look for emolument are not the *respectable gentlemen of fortune*; and that those who grudge their trouble and time are not the *patriotic, independent gentlemen*, of whom it seems the District and County Committees are meant to consist. Your plan seems to be built on the well-founded supposition, that there is sufficient of public spirit among gentlemen of fortune and independence, to incite them to stand forth, and rescue themselves from the hands of Overseers. I verily believe, that

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this expectation will be fully answered. The unwillingness that has long prevailed among gentlemen of fortune to engage in parochial offices, is not to be ascribed to unconcern or indolence; it was because very little good could be done by the exertion of a few well-disposed individuals: they might have inferior persons for their colleagues in office; they might be succeeded, at the end of a year by persons who would studiously undo all that had been begun in the way of reformation. In parishes that were democratical, as most of them are, there have generally been combinations to embarrass and disgust gentlemen, who have been led by public spirit to take upon them offices, that are generally filled and ardently sought for by inferior tradesmen.

THESE and the like reasons are sufficient to account for the reluctance in gentlemen to undertake parochial offices, on the present

sent system ; but I will never be persuaded, till the experiment has been made, that when a system is framed by the legislature, which calls for the united abilities, attention, and public spirit of noblemen and gentlemen of fortune to carry it into execution, for the benefit of their several counties, the parishes where they reside, their neighbours, their tenants, and themselves, besides the great good they will be doing to the poor ; I say, I never will believe, till I see it, that your scheme will fail for want of proper attention in those who constitute your County and District Committees. Should the apprehension of this trouble prevent the legislature from concurring in passing the bill, I can only say, we must bear our poor-rates without murmur, and view the beggary and vagrancy that infests us every where, without indignation, for it is the price we pay for our own ease and inactivity.

THE following objections, I confess, I do not quite understand. The Wakefield Justices express an apprehension, that your scheme will be oppressive to the poor; that, instead of preventing disputes between parishes, it will produce endless litigation; and that it will lead to expences beyond any idea of reasonable computation. All these dreadful consequences I decline saying any thing upon, because I either do not see, or do not understand them; I can, therefore, only answer their bare affirmative with a bare negative, viz. "that such consequences will *not* be produced by Mr. Gilbert's plan."

THUS much of the meeting at Wakefield, and of what I have to say on it; which shall close, as that did, with my thanks to the Chairman, Mr. Zouch—for causing the Resolutions to be printed and published; for tho' they may have done some little harm, by putting nonsense into the heads of those who are more easily

easily swayed by authority than instructed by argument, yet they have made *us* easy, who entertained a suspicion that the acting magistrates at Wakefield had some understanding; and were accordingly inclined to believe, that their public Resolutions on a matter of great national importance could not be wholly void of sound reason, consistency, and good sense.

YOUR other adversary, Mr. Bailey, who sometimes appears in the *Morning Chronicle*, may pass without much observation from me: he has been met on his own ground, I mean in a Morning Paper, by a correspondent, who seems very able to deal with him. I shall only remark, that it is very unusual for a private individual to commit his real name to a news-paper, as he has, without the excuse of any of those motives, which often carry discreet men beyond the limits of prudence. Mr. Bailey is not actuated with the enterprising spirit of a reformer, who will always
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be revered for his generosity and patriotism, even tho' he is unsuccessful in his projected design: his part is the result of a cold, inert, phlegmatic habit; he chuses rather to acquiesce in antient abuses than see them corrected by any novelty, however promising and efficacious. I think, in the former case I myself might feel so fond, and sanguine, as to publish my name, together with my notions; but if I were ever soured by ill-humour, or so biaised by interest, as to dislike any scheme that proposed something good, I should not be led so far as to sign my name in any opposition to it, unless I could propose something better. This Mr. Bailey has not done, nor given any good reason why your plan should not be received; and therefore, in my mind, his opposition does not stand in the most favourable light. In his first letter he gives his reason for this unusual step—"I give my name, to
 "remove every suspicion concerning the

“ AUTHENTICITY of my observations,
 “ or the MOTIVES which induce me to
 “ offer them to the public.” I confess,
 I do not so readily see how a man’s name
 can at once remove suspicions of motives.
 Mr. Bailey is welcome to this original
 idea, as well as to the comment I have
 just made upon the illustration he meant
 to afford it on the present occasion.

ANOTHER opponent has lately shewn
 himself in the same paper in which Mr.
 Bailey writes, the *Morning Chronicle*.
 This gentleman does not sign himself by
 his real name, but that of his office—he
 calls himself *Overseer*. This Overseer,
 like a good parish-officer, fights under co-
 ver of Justice Bailey; they seem to be well
 assorted; and I dare say, the Overseer ex-
 pects all the assertions and common-place
 charges in his letter, when allowed, as
 they must be of course by the Justice,
 should pass, like his own accounts, with-
 out

out any further examination, upon the public. But, as I have before protested against the presumption of Justices of Peace in holding forth their own importance and dignity, I must object to the testimony of an Overseer, who maintains upon his own assertion the sufficiency of himself and his brother-officers. This overseer, as well as Mr. Zouch and his associates the Justices at Wakefield, and Mr. Bailey the Justice of the Peace at Manchester, wishes things just to remain as they are. The laymen are obstinate to retain their *good old laws*; and the Clergy will not consent to charge their good old *Mumpsimus* for all the new-fashioned *Sumpsimuses* in England.

BUT, sir, it is a mortifying reflection, that a scheme of reformation like yours should have to protect itself against the insinuations and vague allegations of the very persons who are the objects of reformation

formation and correction; that when there is so notorious a defect in the Overseers and Justices of Peace in what relates to the poor, the first symptom of hostility should appear among a body of Justices, who have already entered into a confederacy, have assumed a front of menace and attack, are upon the watch for the first motion of the Legislature, when they are to meet at their appointed rendezvous, to muster their forces and stand in array, armed with resolutions, quotations, and misquotations, to oppose the sense of the Public and the votes of Parliament; that, in the mean time, the Papers should teem with letters from Justices and Overseers, all calculated to ward off the approaching reform. When I call this a mortifying reflection, it is because assurance in persons who are to be corrected, is an insult to the understanding of those who are to judge them. In another light, I think you should rather be satisfied; for the Jus-

tices and Overseers seem to have none to speak for them but themselves.

I MUST, before I conclude, say a word upon what is thrown out in Mr. Bailey's last letter, about Great District Workhouses. He labours to shew the certain expences and uncertain benefit of such buildings, and seems to take for granted that they make an essential part of your scheme. Now as I understand from your *Considerations, &c.* you do not intend that large workhouses should be built in every District, nor indeed any at all, unless occasion should call for them : you seem rather to wish that people should not be crowded into workhouses, but where it is found impracticable to relieve or employ them *at home*. This is, I think, the sensible way of managing the affairs of the poor. But it has been wholly abandoned of late ; though it was the policy of the Stat. 43. Eliz. and is, in fact, the part, and only part, of that Act which

Mr.

Mr. Justice Blackstone and others mean to applaud, when they praise the plan introduced in the time of Queen Elizabeth.

IF I understand your plan, it is merely to acquire better instruments than the Overseers, and Justices of the Peace, to assist in accomplishing the great end of the Stat. 43. Eliz.—the relief and employment of the poor. Such instruments, I think, we shall have in your District Committee, District Agent, and his assistants, the new Overseers: and till they, or some other such officers are appointed, the Stat. 43. Eliz. may be applauded, but will never be carried into complete effect.

I FIND, from conversation with different persons, the following objections and observations respecting your plan, in addition to those which are considered by you in your pamphlet, and by me in the pre-

sent Letter. It is thought by some, that your County Committee is unnecessary, and contributes to load the plan, without adding any thing to promote the general design of it. Secondly, it is said, that the great increase of the Poor-rates is to be accounted for in the same manner as the increase on the expences of every private person, the dearness of every article of life.

As to the County Committee, I confess I once thought so myself ; but, on viewing your plan more nearly, I plainly perceived, that it is indispensably necessary to have some such appointment as that of the County Committee. When you throw together the Poor-rates of a whole District, it is to equalize the burthens of the parishes in that District ; for the Poor will then be no longer supported by a Parish, but a District assessment. To carry this plan of equalization still further, something like the County Committee must
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be instituted. It is their business to consider the expences of the several Districts; and after throwing them together, to direct what sum shall be levied for the whole County. Thus the Poor which were first changed from a Parish charge to a District one, and maintained by a sort of District assessment, is again changed to a County concern, and maintained by a sort of County assessment.

YOUR plan might be extended still further; for there might be one Committee for the whole Kingdom, who might equalize the assessments between all the Counties, as your County Committee does between all the Districts in the same County, and the District Committee between all the parishes in the same District. The Poor would then be supported out of a National purse, instead of a County purse; and in proportion to this enlargement of the scheme, all partial views, which, though
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no longer subsisting between Parishes, might still prevail between Counties, would intirely be removed, and every man be relieved, where he was reduced to necessity; because the whole Kingdom would be but as one Parish, where every Englishman had the same right to a settlement, as to the rights of a subject. This equalization of burthen seems to be one of the great hinges on which your scheme is to turn: it appears to me a right one, and the more it is extended the better.

As to the second observation, I think you have demonstrated, that the increase of the Poor-rates is owing to some other cause than the increased price of all articles of provisions. I take for granted that in the incorporated Hundreds in Norfolk and Suffolk, and in the neighbouring parishes, there is no difference in
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the prices of food and cloathing; whence, then, is it, that the rates have *diminished* in the former, and *increased* in the latter? Certainly not from the same cause: it must be from some principle pervading the constitution of the one, which does not exist in the other. It is nothing but the superintendence and œconomy of the Directors and Guardians of the Poor, opposed to the waste and mismanagement of Parish-officers; a comparison which furnishes the great testimony in support of your scheme.

UPON the subject of Poor-rates, I may also add, that the inhabitants of Yorkshire are more easy than those of any other county; which accounts for the manner in which the Wakefield Justices speak of this burthen: in Lancashire I know we feel it very heavy.

I SHALL

I SHALL now, fir, conclude, wishing
you that success which you are intitled
to, and which we all anxiously look for;
and remain,

Your's,

A COUNTRY GENTLEMAN.

Lancaster, March 27.



F I N I S.

